

MAY 23, 2007

NAOMI KLEIN ON HOW TO
STOP THE WAR ON IRAQ

IN THESE TIMES

CHIQUITA'S CHILDREN

The Banana Industry's Poisonous Legacy

Roberto Francisco, 11,
was born with four
deformed limbs. His
father worked in the
Chinandega, Nicaragua
banana plantations
from 1971 to 1992.

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By Phyllis Eckhaus

ESSAY If race didn't exist, our rulers would have to invent it.

Ronald Reagan said the Soviet Union was the focus of evil during the Cold War. I believe that the judiciary is the focus of evil in our society today.

ALAN KEYES
SPEAKING AT THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN
COUNCIL FOR CONSTITUTIONAL
RESTORATION CONFERENCE.



Editorial

Christian Restorationists By Joel Bleifuss

Jim Wallis, *Sojourners* editor and evangelical progressive, has rightly characterized Republican plans to dismantle the filibuster as “a declaration

of religious war.”

But the central issue in this war between the Christian right and the rest of America is not the ultimate confirmation of a handful of reactionary judges. What's at stake is ownership of the U.S. Constitution: Who controls this 218-year old document and to what end?

Two basic schools of thought exist as to how to interpret the Constitution. One holds that we are ruled by a “living constitution”—one in which legal scholar Ronald Dworkin says “key constitutional provisions, as a matter of their original meaning, set out abstract principles rather than concrete or dated rules.” The second school applies a “strict constructionist” approach that maintains the Constitution provides a “rule of law” that is to be interpreted literally. As one strict constructionist justice put it: “The constitution that I, Antonin Scalia, interpret and apply is not living, but dead.”

Historically, interpreting the Constitution has been the provenance of judges appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. But despite the fact that the majority of federal judges are Republican appointees, the Christian right has deemed the federal courts a bastion of the ungodly.

Or, as House Majority Leader Tom DeLay dubbed them, the “left's last legislative body.”

For DeLay and the Christian right, denaturing the filibuster is the first step toward theocracy. The second is passing the Constitution Restoration Act of 2005, which is being sponsored by six senators and 30 representatives.

The act does three things. First, it prohibits the Supreme Court from ruling against any government official or government body whose actions acknowledge “God as the sovereign source of law, liberty or government.” In other words, enshrine the Ten Commandments in public places. Second, it prohibits federal judges from citing the laws or judicial policies “of any foreign state or international organization or agency.” This is aimed at the likes of Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Anthony M. Kennedy, who have all cited international judicial norms in their rulings. Third, the act provides that any judge who rules in either of these two ways “may be removed upon impeachment and conviction.”

In introducing the act, Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) said it was needed to counter the “growing trend in our federal courts ... to secularize our system of government

and divest morality from our rule of law.”

To sell the idea to the public, the Christian right has gathered under the banner of the Judeo-Christian Council for Constitutional Restoration. The group's April 7–8 conference, “Confronting the Judicial War on Faith,” highlighted a number of Christian right luminaries and elected officials. (DeLay had to bow out to attend the pope's funeral.)

At the conference, Phyllis Schlafly said Justice Kennedy's citation of international legal standards in his opinion against executing juveniles was “a good ground for impeachment.”

Christian legal scholar Edwin Vieira disagreed. He said Kennedy should be impeached because his opinion striking down Texas' sodomy statute “upholds Marxist, Leninist, Satanic principles drawn from foreign law.”

Why stop with impeachment? Vieira invoked Joseph Stalin's infamous line: “Death solves all problems: no man, no problem.” “It worked very well for him, whenever he ran into difficulty,” Vieira said.

In late April, Janice Rogers Brown, the U.S. Court of Appeals nominee up again after being rejected via filibuster in 2003, told a crowd at a Darien, Conn. country club that at no time since the Civil War has the country been “so bitterly divided.” “It's not a shooting war, but it is a war,” said Brown. “These are perilous times for people of faith, not in the sense that we are going to lose our lives.”

No, just our Constitution. ■

Letters

We Completely Agree

I am writing to applaud Christopher Hayes for his call to arms for progressives ("How to Turn Your Red State Blue," April 18). There is a need for progressive "missionaries" to reach out to the public and reveal how the new right's policies harm most citizens and fly in the face of Christianity and other religious traditions.

However, a major part of the progressive mission must be a call for election reform, especially after the fraud perpetrated during the 2004 presidential vote. As the Freeman study documented (www.appliedresearch.us/sf/epdiscrep.htm), exit polls favored Kerry in several "battle-ground states" where the vote unexpectedly went to Bush. No such discrepancy occurred in 2000 or in "safe" Bush states like Utah. And as the Hout study showed (verifiedvoting.org/downloads/election04_WP.pdf), the discrepancies

were especially large in voting precincts with electronic voting machines that lack verification for voters or documentation for inspection.

Connect the dots. No other explanation outside of fraud fits these facts. If progressives expect to win the hearts and minds of a wider swath of the electorate, election reform will have to matter, or progressive efforts won't count because their votes won't either.

Stephen G. Perz
Gainesville, Fla.

Seeing Red

Since the last election, you have published a number of well-written and effective articles on what the left can do to dust itself off and start all over again, including Christopher Hayes' "How to Turn Your Red State Blue."

Unfortunately, you've chosen to pick up on the media's blanket labeling of states as "red" and "blue." I'm not sure just how



these labels got started, but I do know that the effect of this kind of sound bite generalization is deceptive and deeply divisive. I can only assume that the labels came from the final count of the Electoral College—and everybody knows that it is an outmoded, undemocratic and elite body that only the right wants to continue.

Again, unfortunately, most of the people in this country have slid easily into using these terms. I even heard someone say that they could "tell" when they passed over the line into Indiana, a "red" state. How ridiculous!

Haven't we learned to stop and think before we adopt the right's terminology? Don't we recognize how we're playing into their hands and strengthening their arguments?

Regarding this issue, I would hope that *In These Times* would once again earn its reputation for political and intellectual leadership by watching its selection of terms. When you do, we will all benefit.

Suzanne Antisdel
Detroit

Autumn of the Patriarchs

In regard to Christopher Hayes' "How to Turn Your Red State Blue":

Progressives should understand that fiddling with somebody's culture is like fiddling with his or her kidneys or lungs. Yes, progressives repre-

sent, and have represented for about a century now, an attack on patriarchy, the fundamental certainty of every human culture, surely, since well before the domestication of fire: That women are men's property.

That is the "value" George W. Bush, like the late pope, celebrates in both his manners and religion. So, to this anthropologist (MA, University of Chicago), it is unsurprising that nearly half of voting American human beings, men and women alike, voted against better public schools and health care and security in old age, but with utmost passion voted for him.

To them, all other issues, war or peace, prosperity or economic collapse, and on and on, are by comparison flatulence in a typhoon, so to speak.

Kurt Vonnegut
New York

Conason Caricatured

"How to Turn Your Red State Blue" is a very interesting piece and I wholly endorse its emphasis on grassroots organizing around real issues. That said, I have to object to the caricaturing of my argument in the introduction to my book *Big Lies*, which Hayes quotes. That essay, and indeed the entire book, is about the reasons why Americans see themselves as conservative despite their consistently liberal views on many issues. Nowhere in the book do I suggest that progressives shouldn't seek to extend their reach, or that somehow American voters will automatically trend back toward liberalism.

Joe Conason
New York

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CHRISTOPHER HAYES RESPONDS

Joe Conason is one of my favorite political journalists, so I'm dismayed that he feels I've caricatured his argument. His book's fundamental thesis is that the right has succeeded spectacularly in misrepresenting itself to the American public, such that they are able to win the votes of a polity that at its core is generally progressive on the issues. While this is a plausible theory, I think the right's success has changed the voters' politics more than is evident from polls on individual issues. Clearly, though, Conason's view doesn't preclude the kind of outreach I discuss, and I'm sorry if that was the implication. I do think, however, that many of those who believe, as Conason does, that the populace already fundamentally agrees with progressives, are more inclined to look for solutions through messaging and framing, both of which I believe are ultimately insufficient.

Armchair Nihilists

I was playing in a punk band in New York in 1986, when G.G. Allin did one of his more notorious club-clearing shows ("End of an Era," April 18). My son, then 3, came up with the best summation of Allin's act: "G.G. Allin makes pee-pee and ca-ca on STAGE!"

Allin's biggest fans seemed to be armchair-badass guys, the kind who admired his

nihilistic fury, take-no-shit stance, and woman-beating, while they live safe, nerdy middle-class-punk existences. I do admire him for urinating on the president of his record company—who was such a fanboy he insisted on playing guitar in Allin's band—on stage. Iggy, on the other hand, had an intense, passionate vulnerability and life force even at his most fucked up. Check the rap at the end of "Gimme Danger" on the Metallic KO album, the live recording of the Stooges' final show (you can hear beer bottles clunking on stage).

Steve Wishnia
New York

Not the Full Story

I was somewhat disappointed in your coverage of the Illinois childcare organizing drive contained within David Moberg's "Which Comes First: Growth or Clout?" (April 18). I have been the point person for the SEIU in Illinois regarding this effort for the past two years.

Your article was inaccurate

when it stated, "Both unions are on the ballot, each having around 10,000 signed membership cards certified by the independent election officials." AFSCME had fewer than 8,000 signed and certified membership cards and SEIU had more than 10,000.

More troublesome to me than this inaccuracy, however, is that I believe the article failed to present many important facts and details regarding the truth of the situation, leaving the reader with the impression that this was simply a matter of two big unions competing to organize the same group of workers. Of course, now that the AFL-CIO has published its decision regarding the Article 21 charges brought by SEIU, more details regarding the truth are public—still not the whole story, though. But the point is that these details were readily available prior to the SEIU's ruling. You just needed to get them for your article.

Bill Perkins
Legislative Director,
SEIU Illinois Council
Chicago

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"With liberty and justice for all..."

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PAUL A. BRONSTEIN/GETTY IMAGES

Food stamps provide the 11-member Vang family \$700 per month.

The Cruellest Cuts

As Congress haggles over food stamp cuts, soup kitchens fear longer lines. *By Mark Winne*

THE LINE FOR FOOD STARTS FORMING AT 7:30 each morning. Mostly women, many small children and some single men are shaking off daybreak's chill hoping to be one of the first 100 people let into the Storehouse, New Mexico's largest emergency food pantry. It isn't that this free food distribution center, located just off Albuquerque's historic Route 66, is stingy; it's just that the Storehouse has enough donated food to feed only 100 families per day.

"In 1999, we served the equivalent of 200,000 meals each year," says Lee Maynard, the Storehouse's executive director. "Right now, we're serving 1.4 million meals per year, 45 percent more than last year. Things are getting worse." And if the Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives has its way with essential safety net services like the food stamp program, things will be getting much worse for Maynard and thousands of his counterparts at emergency food sites across the nation.

To comply with President Bush's budget proposal, which includes tax cuts for the wealthy and more money for the Iraq war, both houses of Congress issued separate budget resolutions that prescribe how much money each of its committees must cut. Where those cuts will come from is up to the respective committees. For instance, the House and Senate agriculture committees oversee tens of billions of dollars in expenditures for programs like conservation, food stamps and crop subsidies for commodities like corn, wheat and cotton. According to their respective resolutions, the Senate Agriculture Committee is required to cut \$2.8 billion over five years from these programs while the more aggressive House must chop \$5.3 billion. Whatever differences emerge between the two committee's budgets—and there *will* be differences—will be resolved by a House and Senate conference committee.

Not OK Computer

Gay rights advocates are sounding off across the country after Microsoft reversed its position on a Washington state diversity bill that would have barred discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The bill failed in the state Senate by one vote on April 22, the day after Microsoft's decision became national news. As Microsoft had long been one of the leading corporations supporting gay rights, many suspect that the sudden about-face was a response to intimidation from right-wing Christian leaders.

Prior to its policy U-turn, Microsoft executives had two meetings with Rev. Ken Hutcherson, pastor of the 3,000-member evangelical Antioch Bible Church. Hutcherson threatened to organize a national boycott against Microsoft. "I told them I was going to give them something to be afraid of Christians about," Hutcherson told the *New York Times*. Microsoft denies any relationship between Hutcherson's threats and the company's now neutral stance on the gay-rights bill.

While the software giant played down its reversal, the decision could reverberate throughout the corporate world, according to John Avavosis, gay-rights activist and founder of *americablog.org*. "Microsoft is one of the largest and most successful companies in the world," Avavosis says. "When Bill Gates says the gays are now too hot to touch, I fear that other business leaders will follow."

Immediately after the bill failed, the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center asked the company to return the Corporate Vision Award it had bestowed upon Microsoft. In a letter to Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer, the center's Lorri L. Jean wrote that the decision "sends a message that the rights of the GLBT community are not only negotiable, but dispensable."

Microsoft repeatedly boasts of diversity within the company on its Web site and even has a GLBT employee group. The site claims, "Microsoft has established a comprehensive plan to promote and integrate diversity at every level within our organization and in everything we do." Everything?

—Jennifer Wedekind

So where will the cuts come from? The president's budget showed uncommon courage by proposing a much-needed limitation on crop subsidies, considered sacrosanct by American agriculture's commodity producers. Republican congressional leaders don't appear to be so bold. Rather than face the ire of the likes of the American Corn Growers Association, House and Senate leaders may find it easier to meet their budgetary reduction quota by cutting food stamps, a program whose recipients don't have access to the well-heeled lobbyists of "Big Ag."

Bush did propose a \$600 million cut in the food stamp program over five years. While not a kingly sum by Washington standards, it's still enough to eliminate 300,000 lower-income Americans from the nation's most important nutrition program. But Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.), chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and Rep. Robert Goodlatte (R-Va.), chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, may not be content with making only 300,000 people hungrier. Both chairmen have made statements to the press indicating that a disproportionate amount of agriculture program cuts will come from food stamps, especially if a conference committee favors the House's higher budget resolution figure.

The impact of such cuts on lower-income families would be enormous. Created by executive order in the early days of the Kennedy administration, the Food Stamp Program is far and away the nation's most important safety net. For millions of households, food stamp benefits—now encoded on an electronic card that can only be used to purchase food at retail food outlets—are literally the only thing that stands between them and hunger. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the number of people who receive food stamps now stands at 25.5 million—2 million more than just a year ago. Are these freeloading welfare cheats? To the contrary, about half of all food stamp recipients are children and about two million are elderly. The average food stamp benefit equals \$1 per meal per food stamp recipient. Hardly enough for that filet mignon food stamp shoppers are so often accused of purchasing.

At the same time that Congress is looking for ways to cut benefits for the most needy, the Senate wants to provide \$129 billion in tax cuts over the next five years to households making more than six figures (the House tax cut target is a miserly \$106 billion). To put these tax cuts in perspective: According to the Center for Budget Policy

Priorities, if the full \$5.3 billion in program cuts recommended by the House came out of the Food Stamp Program, this reduction would equal half the benefits that households with incomes over \$1 million would receive by extending the current capital gains and dividend cuts through 2010.

The cuts would also unreasonably increase demands on private charity. "If people lose food stamps, the first place they'll show up is emergency food programs, which are already overburdened," says Gina Cornia, executive director of Utahns Against Hunger. Utah, which would lose \$26 million in food stamp benefits over five years if the full House cut goes through, is ranked by the USDA as having the fifth highest rate of hunger and food insecurity in the country. Like other food banks around the country, Utah's rely primarily on donations of food to serve needy families. In fact, Utah's emergency food system spent only \$106,000 in cash to buy food for its warehouses in 2004. But food donations have been flat for some time now, says Cornia, who simply can't imagine how food banks would provide an additional \$26 million worth of food to people who formerly relied on food stamps.

Two thousand miles away on Ninth Avenue in New York City, more than 1,100 hungry people line up every day at the Church of the Holy Apostles, one of the largest of the 1,300 soup kitchens and food pantries serving New Yorkers. Echoing the alarm sounded by his Western counterparts, the soup kitchen's director, the Rev. Bill Greenlaw, recently told the *New York Times*, "It's a desperate thing. Every level of government seems to have the same mantra, that these programs are vulnerable."

The president wants budget cuts, tax cuts and more money for the military. Republican congressional leaders will follow their president. The Senate may try to minimize the pain inflicted on the poor with severe but less drastic cuts on food stamps, while the House, led by Rep. Goodlatte, appears more interested in protecting crops subsidies than worrying about the hungry. In the meantime, Maynard, Cornia, Greenlaw and thousands of other emergency food program operators and anti-hunger advocates see nothing but longer lines and more pain. ■

MARK WINNE is a freelance writer from Santa Fe, New Mexico. He can be reached by e-mail at win5m@aol.com.

APPALL-O-METER

1.3 Threats to Our Way of Life

"We don't comment on the corporate terrorist activities of PETA. They are corporate terrorists, and, just like the United States government, we will not negotiate with corporate terrorists." That's what Bonnie Warschauer, a spokeswoman for KFC, had to say about a dark plot by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to picket its restaurants around the country in protest of slaughter techniques the animal-rights group believes are cruel.

The company seems to have developed its own counterterrorism strategy. In Brownsville, Texas, three PETA evildoers, one dressed as a chicken, picketed a KFC but soon were confronted by pissed-off Texan meat-eater David Ingersoll. With a bullhorn and two stepchildren in tow, this gentleman followed the protesters, peppering them with imprecations. "You bunch of crazy animal-rights nuts!" Ingersoll blared at the protesters. "You're not going to win. Not in Brownsville!"

"I don't know about you, but I want my chicken to be cut in the throat, hung upside down and bled to death," Ingersoll told the *Brownsville Herald*. "I'm waiting for someone to throw a cabrito head at them so they know what part of the country they are in."

To finish the affair, the manager of the KFC doused the protesters with the res-

taurant's sprinkler system. "As far as I'm concerned, they are terrorists," the manager, John Olivo, told the *Brownsville Herald*. "I'm trying to make a living and they are trying to stop my people from making a living. To me, there is no difference between them and al Qaeda."

5.2 Tricky 'Dict XVI

Following the election of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI, William

Donohue, the pugnacious leader of the ultramontane Catholic League, issued a statement declaring his organization to be delighted, adding, with becoming piety, "Those who are not need to do some real soul

searching."

We heartily agree, and humbly recommend the use of the following study aid: a confidential letter Ratzinger sent to all Catholic bishops in 2001 when he headed the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The letter, publicized by the *London Observer*, instructed bishops that they must not refer priestly abuse cases to civil authorities. Rather, they should investigate abuse allegations "in the most secretive way restrained by a perpetual silence, and everyone is to observe the strictest secret which is commonly regarded as a secret of the Holy Office under the penalty of excommunication."

Ah, the splendor of truth!

—Dave Mulcahey



Animosity in the East

Tensions flare between China and Japan. By Jehangir S. Pocha

BEIJING—INITIALLY, observers blamed the ferocious anti-Japanese protests that erupted on April 9 on the confluence of four controversial issues—the new textbooks in Japan that allegedly gloss over its WW II atrocities, an oil-driven territorial dispute in the Senkaku islands, Japan's restatement of military support for Taiwan and Tokyo's bid for membership in the U.N. Security Council.

"The coming together of all this invoked anti-Japanese feelings that are well rooted in Chinese society," says Jin Linbo, director of Asia-Pacific Studies at the China Institute of International Studies in Beijing.

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's public apology for Japan's colonial and wartime past at the Bandung Conference in Indonesia led the Chinese government to ban further protests, and passions here subsided. But the precision with which the ostensibly impromptu protests began and stopped has led many here to see Beijing's hand in organizing them.

"The root of the problem is that Japan has been trying in recent years to 'normalize' its statehood and play a greater role in international affairs and China is now trying to diminish Japan's role in the world," says Jing Huang, a senior fellow at the foreign policy studies program at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C.

Since the mid-'90s, Japan has attempted to shake off its postwar guilt and acquire greater political influence in the world. With China also looking to increase its global status, the

two nations have been on a collision course, Jing says.

Japan has irked China by restructuring its armed forces, outplaying Beijing in several major business deals and, perhaps most critically, via Koizumi's decision to worship at the controversial Yasukuni shrine that commemorates Japan's war dead. For its part, Beijing has riled Tokyo by engaging in an arms buildup, drilling close to the disputed Senkaku islands, opposing Japan's entry into the U.N. Security Council and deliberately excluding discussions of Japan's postwar apology and behavior in Chinese textbooks and media.

Steeling attitudes on both sides is a chauvinistic nationalism that is being fanned by those in power in both countries, albeit for different reasons and in different ways.

"In Japan, after 10 years of stagnation, there is a fear that the country has peaked," Jing says. "Many Japanese feel threatened and try to make up for this loss in confidence with excessive militaristic thinking."

In China, a Communist Party "lacking in legitimacy because of the mistakes made during the Cultural Revolution and reform process is propping itself up using nationalist credentials," says Wang Jianwei, chair of the political science department at the University of Wisconsin.

These tendencies have hijacked politics in Japan and China "to such an extent that it denies them rationality in decision-making and may undermine the national interest of both," Jing says.

For Japan, which only apolo-



In Shanghai, Chinese demonstrators shout anti-Japan slogans.

gized in 1995 for its actions in WWII, the current fracas is drawing attention to what many Asian nations have always considered a belated acknowledgment of their suffering during the war. The fallout might once again raise the issue of reparations that could cost Tokyo billions. The Chinese government, which signed away its right to collect punitive damages from Japan when the two countries reestablished diplomatic ties in 1972, is already supporting compensation lawsuits by Chinese citizens in Japanese courts.

But the Chinese government's tacit support for the student protests "could come back to create even bigger problems" for it domestically, says the China Institute's Jin.

In a society full of pent-up frustrations, "whenever there is an outpouring of passions on the streets the government should be worried about where it will lead," says Alan Wachman, associate professor of international politics at Tufts University. "The [Tiananmen Square] protests of spring 1989 did not emerge for the purposes they eventually came to represent, and one could see how a protest aimed at expressing irritation to

Japan can spill over into other areas or be seen as license to protest by other groups."

Already, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's March statement to the National People's Congress (the country's rubber-stamp parliament) that Japan must not be accepted into the global community until it "faces up to history" is taking the Communist Party toward thin ice.

Jin says, "It is quite difficult for China's leadership to recognize that China also has to reflect on its history," both domestically, where the Maoist years resulted in more than 30 million deaths, and overseas in places such as Cambodia, where Maoist China supported the Khmer Rouge as it killed nearly 1.8 million people.

Though Japan, which is trying to soothe things over with China, has still not made that argument, revenge attacks on Chinese banks and schools in Japan have started to occur.

Jing says he expects this to change soon, but can't be sure. "Things have reached a very critical point. I've never seen it so bad," he says. ■

JEHANGIR POCHA is the Far East correspondent for *In These Times*.

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SUSAN PLUM IS challenging the Mexican government's massive failure to effectively investigate and halt the killing spree in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, which has taken the lives of more than 370 women in the past 12 years. Plum, an artist who lives and works in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, has decided to shed light on the mysterious string of female abductions and murders—one candle at a time.

Last summer she began circulating via e-mail the idea for "Luz y Solidaridad" ("Light and Solidarity"), an art project that calls for people everywhere to help her "bring light to Juárez, especially to the mothers and the families of the young women and girls who have been murdered." The installation exhibit and performance, set to open February 4, 2006, at the Museo de la Ciudad in Querétaro, Mexico, will incorporate photographs of votives that have been lit all over the world for the women of the Mexican border town.

According to Amnesty International, 137 of the 370 murders in Juárez and the surrounding area of Chihuahua, have involved sexual assault. Additionally, somewhere between 70 and 400 women and girls remain missing.

Many of the women killed have been abducted near their workplaces—the *maquilas* (factories) located on the outskirts of Juárez. Kari Lydersen writes in her new book,

Out of the Sea and into the Fire, "They disappear while waiting for or leaving the buses that take them to and from work, or after visiting the bars that are popular with *maquila* workers on Friday nights." Pervasive machismo and a culture that demeans women are also to blame for the pattern of violence. As National Public Radio's John Burnett reported, "It's a common joke [in Juárez] when two men see a provocatively dressed woman, for one to elbow the other and say, 'She better watch out or she'll end up in the desert.'"

President Vicente Fox claims that the unsolved murders in Juárez are among his administration's top priorities. His special prosecutor, Maria Lopez Urbina, has reviewed the state's prosecution process and found probable cause for criminal investigations into more than 100 Chihuahua state public officials for negligence, omission and related offenses. Despite these findings, the Fox administration maintains that it does not have jurisdiction to preside over official investigations—the cases have been returned to the prosecutors

and courts that mishandled them from the start.

To protest these governmental failures, Plum is asking people to join her in a simple gesture to show support for the victims. "In lighting a votive for *one* of these young women and girls who have been murdered, we will help illuminate a path so

that their spirit can move out of darkness into the light."

Lighting a votive also serves as a solace to the victims' mothers. "These women stand alone, feeling invisible and abandoned in their community," says Plum, who this past summer met with three mothers through the *Mujeres de Juárez* organization. "I feel and hope this act of kindness, compassion and depth will give them a sense of empowerment."

Plum's artistic and humanitarian mission is to collect printed and personally signed photographs of everyone's candles and assemble them into one installation. She intends to showcase large hanging brooms in the space, along with other objects that possess symbolic significance. "Mexico has a long-standing tradition of sweeping," says Plum. "Women, mostly, sprinkle water outside their doors and sweep the front of their homes and street." Plum hopes to build on this power and energy of the feminine, by having the mothers, who will be dispersed among performing sweepers, play bullroars— sacred



Light and Solidarity

By Erin Mosely

pre-Columbian instruments.

"There is no justice for these women, and my intention for 'Luz y Solidaridad' is not only as art-activism but as a moving and shared experience for both the mothers and the audience."

"After initiating the first e-mail," Plum says, "I was getting about 30 e-mails a day." Because of this encouraging feedback, she plans to link "Luz" with a local political event focusing on the women of Juárez. When the show opens next February, she would like to organize a conference at Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro.

"Combining the experiential with the political-educational," she says, "is something I want to strive for."

Perhaps the light emanating from Querétaro will help expose the injustice and spark a serious investigation. ■

To participate in "Luz y Solidaridad" and light your own votive, contact Susan Plum at luzysoli@yahoo.com.



Left Out

DURING THE CLOSING PLENARY OF THE 2005 Left Forum—the conference formerly known as the Socialist Scholars—Bogdan Denitch of the Institute on Transitions to Democracy asserted, “Ninety-nine percent of the American people are to the right of us in this room.”

Granted, in context, the remark was to be taken as a wake-up call. Yet, there was something self-congratulatory about it as well, a sense of “we’re better than they.” It brought to mind those old Mensa buttons that bragged of the wearer’s IQ in relation to the rest of the population by simply stating, “2%.”

Denitch’s assessment was also debatable, so it was remarkable that no one else on the dais challenged him on it.

The official theme of the conference, held April 15–17 at the City University of New York (CUNY), was “The U.S., the World, and the Next Four Years.” Unofficially, it was, in the rhetoric of the speakers and the musings of many audience members, “inside/outside.”

Of what? For the most part, the Democratic Party. But the inside/outside dichotomy surfaced in other instances—suggesting it is the left itself that is in trouble and out of touch.

Inside the CUNY center, the conference-goers were mostly middle-aged, middle-class, white, highly educated and dressed respectably, conservatively even, in natural fibers that ran the chromatic gamut from beige to brown, except for an occasional outraged or outrageous t-shirt, some Green Party buttons and Medea Benjamin’s pink coat.

During the same closing plenary, Benjamin, of Global Exchange, asked how many people present were under 30 years old. A tenth of the audience raised their hands.

It was even worse at the opening plenary, where Michael Albert of *Z-Net* observed that the average age was probably 54. “In the ’60s, we used to applaud when someone over 50 attended an event like this,” he said later. “Now it’s just the opposite.”

Outside, on the corner of 34th Street and Fifth Avenue, the tourists and vendors who mingled on the sidewalk in front of the Empire State Building were more diverse culturally, chronologically, linguistically, ethnically and economically. And a heck of a lot more colorful.

And who’s to say what their politics were? Or could be?

Such demographics were not lost on all of the speakers. “The left is too white,” said New York City Councilman Bill Perkins during the panel “After the 2004 Elections: Progressive Responses.” “It is a great conceit bordering on arrogance for us not to be responding to what the people want,” he continued, accusing the left of being somewhat intentionally “disconnected.”

One reason for that disconnect might be that the left too frequently disregards the mainstream media, as Danny Schechter of Mediachannel.org observed during a panel on “Media in the Context of Globalization.” “We don’t watch it, we don’t see how flawed the coverage is, how superficial,” he said. “We don’t get exposed to the information sources of most Americans.”

Likewise, the poet Amiri Baraka, during the packed panel “Freedom Dreamin’: Imagining Socialism,” noted, “The bourgeoisie not only rule by carrot and gun but by making popular forms carry imperialist messages.”

“We have been too content merely to criticize imperialism,” Baraka said. “The majority [of Americans] already know this [political system] is bad. The question is, what kind of alternative have we, the intellectuals, created that they feel magnetized to?”

Also missing, as Denitch astutely noted, was the left religious community.

Denitch’s own presence at the podium raised more than a few eyebrows, however, considering the schism that had led to the establishment of the new conference in the first place.

The Left Forum was conceived as an alternative to the old Socialist Scholars Conference, which Denitch had headed for 19 of its 23 years. As one person “inside” the defecting team explained, about half the old conference board felt left out of the decision-making process and therefore left the organization. There were supposed to be two conferences this year, but the one that kept the name Socialist Scholars Conference didn’t happen, and Denitch was invited to speak at the new one, albeit as something of an outsider.

The final speaker at the closing plenary, Ron Daniels of the Center for Constitutional Rights, was talking about the Democratic Party when he said, “The best way to influence the inside is to have a strong outside.”

But perhaps we need to step outside as well. ■

The “inside/outside” dichotomy surfaced throughout the conference—suggesting that the left is out of touch.

JODY KOLODZEY is co-chair of the Philadelphia Chapter of the National Writers Union, and a long-time contributor to *In These Times*.



House Call *By Rep. Bernie Sanders*

Remote Control

Apparently
the right-wing
ideologues
believe
they know
best what
programs
Americans
should be
allowed to
purchase
and view.

IN HIS 2004 INAUGURAL ADDRESS, PRESIDENT Bush spoke repeatedly about the need to bring freedom and liberty to the world. In fact, he was so focused on the concept that he referenced the word “freedom” a whopping 27 times during the 21-minute speech. I’m happy the president is embracing the concept of freedom. Now if we could only get him to start practicing what he preaches.

Since his inauguration address, President Bush and his right-wing colleagues in Congress have launched a full-scale effort to limit and control the programming Americans are able to see and hear over the airwaves and the Internet. In short, they’re going after your computer, your radio and your remote control.

In March, the House passed legislation to dramatically raise “indecent” fines for broadcast television imposed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to \$500,000. Rep. Joe Barton (R-Texas), chairman of the House Commerce Committee, heralded the high fines, saying, “This legislation makes great strides in making it safe for families to come back into their living room.”

Emboldened by this success, conservative leaders like Barton and Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) are threatening to go even further. For the first time, they want to apply indecency standards to cable, to satellite and even to the Internet.

“We put restrictions on the over-the-air signals,” Stevens, chair of the Senate Commerce Committee, said in March, while speaking to the National Association of Broadcasters annual state leadership conference. “Cable is a greater violator in the indecency arena. ... I think we can put restrictions on cable itself. At least I intend to do my best to push that.”

And Barton told reporters, “In the foreseeable future, you are going to see a convergence [of standards]. I stand by that. ... The impact [of indecency programming] is going to be the same in the home. It’s irrelevant what the ownership or the origination of it is.”

If Stevens and Barton have their way, it means goodbye to “The Sopranos,” goodbye to Jon Stewart’s “Daily Show,” goodbye to the boys of “South Park,” goodbye to “Deadwood,” goodbye to Dave Chappelle and goodbye to many other shows enjoyed by millions. Faced with strict FCC censorship rules, all of these programs will be removed from television altogether, substantially rewritten, or banished to late night.

Let’s keep in mind that these are not shows broadcast on public airwaves but rather on cable programs that consumers select and pay for. Apparently the right-wing ideologues believe they know best what programs Americans should be allowed to purchase and view. If these regulations are imposed on paid cable and satellite networks, it will have a chilling impact on freedom of expression in America. Today, they are going after Howard Stern and Tony Soprano. Tomorrow, who will be their target? Will it become “indecent” to criticize the president?

These effects have already been seen on broadcast television. Given the looser rules governing cable and satellite, the change to paid programming will be even more drastic under FCC oversight. Controversial or cutting-edge shows will become increasingly rare as programmers become more and more limited in the types of topics they are willing to explore and the kinds of guests they will invite.

Sadly, this is not the only effort currently under way by the right to determine what material is appropriate for the American public to see, hear and read. The effort to censor cable becomes even more ominous when viewed as part of the larger attempt by the Bush administration and its allies to limit public discussion of minority opinions.

In recent years, the Republican leadership has used unprecedented measures to crush dissent in Congress. During the recent passage of the Bankruptcy Bill, for example, no opposition amendments were allowed on the floor of the House—effectively silencing public debate of the bill.

Perhaps the most blatant example of intolerance for dissenting viewpoints, however, comes from Bush himself, who is currently traveling the country holding “town meetings” on his Social Security privatization plan. Despite the fact that these ostensibly public meetings are paid for by taxpayers, American citizens who disagree with Bush are not allowed to attend.

It is in this context of an overall attack on dissenting opinions that the effort to censor cable and satellite TV becomes truly frightening. This is not simply about cleaning up offensive content; it is about the extreme right wing pushing to limit the free exchange of ideas. The time has come for all Americans who love freedom to let the government know that they don’t want Uncle Sam turning into Big Brother. ■

BERNIE SANDERS,
Vermont Independent, is the author of the Stamp Out Censorship Act (H.R. 1440), which would bar the government from applying the FCC’s vague “indecent” standard to programs on cable or satellite or material on the Internet.



Black Clergy Rebuff Bush

DURING THE RUN-UP TO THE U.S. INVASION OF Iraq, the Rev. Al Sampson helped to organize Chicago's Black Mobilization Committee Against the War and regularly opened his church to anti-war rallies and other progressive actions. His Fernwood United Methodist Church, on Chicago's far South Side, showed films like *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

And Sampson's church is just one of many in Chicago that aggressively confronts the Bush administration's cynical attempt to capture black mind share with its focus on God, gays and vouchers.

As I noted in my last column, the GOP is trying to hitch a ride on Christian piety into the black community. But that ride is getting rather bumpy. In January, an unprecedented gathering of the nation's four largest black Baptist groups issued a joint statement that basically repudiated the thrust of the GOP's outreach efforts. The group gave short shrift to issues like same-sex marriage and abortion, heavily pushed by Bush's evangelical supporters.

And that was intentional. The Baptists sought to convey their irritation with the GOP's focus on such peripheral issues rather than on the real concerns of black Americans. The joint statement represented the National Baptist Convention (NBUSA), the National Baptist Convention of America Inc., the Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc. and the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America. The NBUSA is the largest black religious group in the nation, with 7 million members. Together the four groups represent about 15 million black Baptists.

"My position on same-sex marriage is not that it is the sole determinant on moral issues," NBUSA President William Shaw told the *New York Times*. "Marriage is threatened more by adultery, and we don't have a constitutional ban on that."

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, himself a Baptist minister, was a special speaker at the January convention. In a recent interview, he explained to *In These Times* how he helped unmask the GOP's distracting tactics. "I asked them [the thousands of delegates] how many wanted a higher minimum wage, a stable Social Security system, more effective affirmative action and an end to the war in Iraq, and thousands of hands were raised," he said. "Then I asked them how many of them were in churches that blessed same-sex unions, and no hands went up. Now, I asked them, 'how did that get in the middle of our agenda?'"

Jackson's rhetorical question directly revealed how

the GOP seeks to employ symbol over substance, and it may well have been instrumental in framing the group's final statement. The first item of the nine-point statement made clear that these black Baptists were far from the Bush plantation. "We call for an end to the war in Iraq and withdrawal of U.S. military personnel from Iraq," it reads. Other points call for the extension of the Voting Rights Act, opposition to the confirmation of Alberto Gonzales as attorney general, "full commitment to the public education system," and opposition to school vouchers. The statement characterizes the administration's budget cuts in Medicaid and the CHIP program as immoral, calls for an end to the prison-industrial complex and ... well, you get the point. These are not Bush folks.

And since this group represents, by far, the largest number of African-American Christians, it's safe to say that the black church has not yet fallen under the faith-based spell of the GOP. The Republicans' stress on hot-button cultural issues has swayed some individual black believers to the right, but that's nothing new.

"When Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner heard the voice of God telling them to stand up and fight for freedom, there were other black Christians (Africans from the continent who were also in bondage!) who felt that liberation was not as important as cooperation," wrote the Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. in a recent editorial in *The Trinity Trumpet*, the publication of his church, Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. He noted that many in the black church also were critical of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "Cooperation was the agenda for those black Christians, not liberation," Wright wrote. The GOP is hoping that faith-based funding will sweeten the pot for that kind of cooperation.

But the party seems to be overreaching. The brazen linkage of faith-based goodies to GOP allegiance has troubled black religious conservatives. "Federal grants will change the way churches think about how to serve their communities," wrote Star Parker, a prominent black conservative, in a February 1 syndicated column. "Time, energy and creativity will no longer be focused on coming up with creative solutions to problems but on how to structure programs to qualify for grants." She added, "It's the nature of politics that money and favors go hand in hand."

If faith-based funding smells like bribery even to some of Bush's strongest supporters, its rancid odor is likely to keep the GOP stuck on the black church's back steps. ■

In January, the nation's four largest black Baptist groups issued a joint statement repudiating the GOP's outreach efforts.

SALIM MUWAKKIL is a senior editor at *In These Times*, a contributing columnist to the *Chicago Tribune* and a *Crime and Communities Media Fellow* of the *Open Society Institute*.

Democracy's Death

Haitian dissidents find themselves the targets of massive repression.

BY BEN TERRALL

IN SYNC WITH ITS GRANDIOSE CLAIMS about building democracy in the Middle East, the Bush administration is promoting new elections in Haiti in October and November as the great hope for the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Yet, while Washington provides diplomatic, political and military support for the Haitian government of Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, hooded police and death squads are systematically repressing political supporters of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Aristide's Lavalas Party is still the Haitian political organization with the most popular support by a large margin. Months after the February 29, 2004, coup that drove Aristide from office, Conrad Tribble of the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince conceded, "If there were an election held today, Lavalas would win." But today, Lavalas partisans can barely go outdoors safely, while the right-wing paramilitary leader Guy Philippe, who was trained by U.S. Special Forces in Ecuador in the '90s, has launched his own political party, the Front for National Reconstruction.

In the beginning of February 2004, Philippe led U.S.-trained paramilitaries across the border from the Dominican Republic in attacks on Haiti's second largest city, Cap-Haitien. Also directing the paramilitary attacks was Louis-Jodel Chamblain, former second-in-command of the Revolutionary Front for Haitian Advancement and Progress, an anti-Lavalas death squad that the CIA helped create in 1993. In the following two weeks, these forces emptied Haiti's prisons; among those set free were anti-Aristide death squad veterans from the 1991-1994 coup period. The new regime has now filled the jails with government officials, teachers and Lavalas supporters.

Thomas Griffin, a Philadelphia immigration lawyer, interviewed both poor slum dwellers and rich elites in Haiti for a report recently published by the University of Miami's Center for the Study of Human Rights. The report noted, "Haiti's security and justice institutions fuel the cycle of violence. Sum-

mary executions are a police tactic. ... Haiti's brutal and disbanded army has returned to join the fray. Suspected dissidents fill the prisons, their constitutional rights ignored. As voices for nonviolent change are silenced by arrest, assassination or fear, violent defense becomes a credible option."

Much of the repression has occurred under the watch of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), established by the U.N. Security Council on June 1, 2004. A March 2005 report by the Harvard Law Student Advocates for Human Rights and the Global Justice Center notes that the mission was endowed "with a strong mandate in three principal areas: providing a secure and stable environment, particularly through disarmament; supporting the political process and good governance in preparation for upcoming elections; and monitoring and reporting on human rights," but it has "made little, if any, progress on any of these three fronts."

The Harvard report concludes: "MINUSTAH has provided cover for abuses commit-

ted by the HNP [Haitian National Police] during operations in poor, historically tense Port-au-Prince neighborhoods. Rather than advising and instructing the police in best practices, and monitoring their missteps, MINUSTAH has been the midwife of their abuses." The report also attacked the United Nations' unwillingness to protect civilians from political violence, saying, "the failure to do so when civilians beg for U.N. assistance is simply incomprehensible."

Violent imprisonment

Father Gerard Jean-Juste, famous in both Haiti and the diaspora for decades of service to the poor, is still working on the ground in Port-au-Prince. On October 13, 2004, masked Haitian police arrested Jean-Juste as he was feeding hundreds of hungry children at his parish.

Latortue claimed there was a warrant for Jean-Juste's arrest, but no one ever produced the document or any evidence linking the priest to a crime. This means the arrest was in violation of Haiti's con-



Supporters hug paramilitary leader Louis-Jodel Chamblain, who was released by the Latortue regime after an overnight trial that Amnesty International deemed "an insult to justice."

stitution, but the U.S. State Department explained this away, saying, "Haitian legal experts have told us that under Haitian law, the government can hold Father Jean-Juste for up to three months in his current status while finalizing the case against him." A State Department spokesperson also assured reporters that Jean-Juste was being "lawfully held."

But as one of Jean-Juste's lawyers, Loyola University New Orleans professor William Quigley, put it: "The situation here is very bad—there is no real law except the law of the powerful."

On November 29, Jean-Juste was released for lack of evidence. He told *In These Times*, "A guy like me is lucky." While imprisoned, his wrists were cuffed so tightly that circulation hadn't completely returned in one hand, but "they didn't beat me." Twelve of his fellow cellmates had been beaten so badly "their heads were broken."

In contrast to Jean-Juste, Ted Nazaire's case received no international attention. Nazaire was arrested after fighting with his brother. Because a judge happened to be passing by when the fight occurred, a warrant actually was filled out for his ar-

rest, unlike most of his fellow inmates. A tall, muscular man of 26, Nazaire spent four months in prison until his mother resorted to bribing a judge to gain his release.

While in prison, Nazaire witnessed the bloody December 1 massacre of prisoners by guards at the National Penitentiary—the same day that Colin Powell was engaged in a high-profile meeting with Latortue. Nazaire estimates that police systematically killed at least 60 prisoners. Other eyewitnesses, including Radio Megastar journalist Saby Kettny, who saw police firing machine guns from a catwalk at prisoners, confirm that mass executions took place. According to the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, on December 1, only 22 of the 1,041 prisoners in the National Penitentiary had been convicted of a crime.

The swollen eye, knot on his head, and bruised arms and legs testified to the severe beating Nazaire received from guards who threatened to kill him if he talked about the massacre. Nazaire and his family have since gone into hiding for their safety.

A complicit media

Jean-Juste says that on most Haitian radio stations "everything bad happening this week

will be blamed on Lavalas." The stations, primarily owned by elites who opposed Aristide's efforts to increase the minimum wage and advance other progressive initiatives, have demonized Lavalas for years.

The press owner's association, the National Association of Haitian Media, is a member of the Group of 184, an anti-Lavalas outfit masquerading as a civil society umbrella group that spearheaded the coup with funding from the U.S.-based International Republican Institute (itself an arm of the National Endowment for Democracy). Between 2001 and 2003 the European Commission contributed approximately \$890,000 to organizations affiliated with the Group of 184, and the U.S. Agency for International Development allocated more than \$3 million. This funding occurred during the U.S. aid embargo that financially paralyzed the Aristide government.

Andre Apaid Jr., the Group of 184's leader, is a factory owner who founded Haiti's main TV station, Tele-Haiti, and led the 2003 campaign opposing Aristide's decision to double the minimum wage. For the University of Miami report, Griffin talked to numerous sources who described Apaid's support for the Port-au-Prince gang leader Labanyé, who had terrorized the city's residents before his

Continued on page 29

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ارفع يد الاعمار لا سلاح التخریب
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A billboard in
Basra reads "Raise
your hand for
reconstruction,
not a weapon for
destruction."

HOW TO END THE WAR

EDITORS' NOTE: *The following essay is adapted from remarks made at the National Teach-in on Iraq sponsored by the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. The teach-in was held on March 24, the 40th anniversary of the first teach-in on the Vietnam War, which was held at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.*

THE CENTRAL QUESTION WE NEED to answer is this: What were the real reasons for the Bush administration's invasion and occupation of Iraq?

When we identify why we really went to war—not the cover reasons or the re-branded reasons, freedom and democracy, but the real reasons—then we can become more effective anti-war activists. The most effective and strategic way to stop this occupation and prevent future wars is to deny the people who wage these wars their spoils—to make war unprofitable. And we can't do that unless we effectively identify the goals of war.

When I was in Iraq a year ago trying to answer that question, one of the most effective ways I found to do that was to follow the bulldozers and construction machinery. I was in Iraq to research the so-called reconstruction. And what struck me most was the absence of reconstruction machinery, of cranes and bulldozers, in downtown Baghdad. I expected to see reconstruction all over the place.

I saw bulldozers in military bases. I saw bulldozers in the Green Zone, where a huge amount of construction was going on, building up Bechtel's headquarters and getting the new U.S. embassy ready. There was also a ton of construction going on at all of the U.S. military bases. But, on the streets of Baghdad, the former ministry buildings are absolutely untouched. They hadn't even cleared away the rubble, let alone started the reconstruction process.

The one crane I saw in the streets of Baghdad was hoisting an advertising billboard. One of the surreal things about Baghdad is that the old city lies in ruins, yet there are these shiny new billboards advertising the glories of the global economy. And the message is: "Everything you were before isn't worth rebuilding." We're going to import a brand-new country. It is the Iraq version of the "Extreme Makeover."

It's not a coincidence that Americans were at home watching this explosion of extreme reality television shows where people's bodies were being surgically remade and their homes were being bulldozed and reconstituted. The message of these shows is: Everything you are now, everything you own, everything you do sucks. We're going to completely erase it and rebuild it with a team of experts. You just go limp and let the experts take over. That is exactly what "Extreme Makeover: Iraq" is.

There was no role for Iraqis in this process. It was all foreign companies modernizing the country. Iraqis with engineering Ph.D.s who built their electricity system and who built their telephone system had no place in the reconstruction process.

If we want to know what the goals of the war are, we have to look at what Paul Bremer did when he first arrived in Iraq. He

laid off 500,000 people, 400,000 of whom were soldiers. And he shredded Iraq's constitution and wrote a series of economic laws that the *The Economist* described as "the wish list of foreign investors."

Basically, Iraq has been turned into a laboratory for the radical free-market policies that the American Enterprise Institute and the Cato Institute dream about in Washington, D.C., but are only able to impose in relative slow motion here at home.

So we just have to examine the Bush administration's policies and actions. We don't have to wield secret documents or massive conspiracy theories. We have to look at the fact that they built enduring military bases and didn't rebuild the country. Their very first act was to protect the oil ministry leaving the the rest of the country to burn—to which Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld responded: "Stuff happens." There was an almost apocalyptic glee in allowing Iraq to burn. They let the country be erased, leaving a blank slate that they could rebuild in their image. This was the goal of the war.



A Baghdad family resorts to using an oil lamp during an all-too-common blackout.

The big lie

The administration says the war was about fighting for democracy. That was the big lie they resorted to when they were caught in the other lies. But it's a different kind of a lie in the sense that it's a useful lie. The lie that the United States invaded Iraq to bring freedom and democracy not just to Iraq but, as it turns out, to the whole world, is tremendously useful—because we can first expose it as a lie and then we can join with Iraqis to try to make it true. So it disturbs me that a lot of progressives are afraid to use the language of democracy now that George W. Bush is using it. We are somehow giving up on the most powerful emancipatory ideas ever created, of self-determination, liberation and democracy.

And it's absolutely crucial not to let Bush get away with stealing and defaming these ideas—they are too important.

In looking at democracy in Iraq, we first need to make the distinction between elections and democracy. The reality is the Bush administration has fought democracy in Iraq at every turn.

Why? Because if genuine democracy ever came to Iraq, the real goals of the war—control over oil, support for Israel, the construction of enduring military bases, the privatization of the entire economy—would all be lost. Why? Because Iraqis don't want them and they don't agree with them. They have said it over and over again—first in opinion polls, which is why the Bush administration broke its original promise

to have elections within months of the invasion. I believe Paul Wolfowitz genuinely thought that Iraqis would respond like the contestants on a reality TV show and say: "Oh my God. Thank you for my brand-new shiny country." They didn't. They protested that 500,000 people had lost their jobs. They protested the fact that they were being shut out of the reconstruction of their own country, and they made it clear they didn't want permanent U.S. bases.

That's when the administration broke its promise and appointed a CIA agent as the interim prime minister. In that period they locked in—basically shackled—Iraq's future governments to an International Monetary Fund program until 2008. This will make the humanitarian crisis in Iraq much, much deeper. Here's just one example: The IMF and the World Bank are demanding the elimination of Iraq's food ration program, upon which 60 percent of the population depends for nutrition, as a condition for debt relief and for the new loans that have been made in deals with an unelected government.

In these elections, Iraqis voted for the United Iraqi Alliance. In addition to demanding a timetable for the withdrawal of troops, this coalition party has promised that they would create 100 percent full employment in the public sector—i.e., a total rebuke of the neocons' privatization agenda. But now they can't do any of this because their democracy has been shackled. In other words, they have the vote, but no real power to govern.

A pro-democracy movement

The future of the anti-war movement requires that it become a pro-democracy movement. Our marching orders have been given to us by the people of Iraq. It's important to understand that the most powerful movement against this war and this occupation is within Iraq itself. Our anti-war movement must not just be in verbal solidarity but in active and tangible solidarity with the overwhelming majority of Iraqis fighting to end the occupation of their country. We need to take our direction from them.

Iraqis are resisting in many ways—not just with armed resistance. They are organizing independent trade unions. They are opening critical newspapers, and then having those newspapers shut down. They are fighting privatization in state factories. They are forming new political coalitions in an attempt to force an end to the occupation.

So what is our role here? We need to support the people of Iraq and their clear demands for an end to both military and corporate occupation. That means being the resistance ourselves in our country, demanding that the troops come home, that U.S. corporations come home, that Iraqis be free of Saddam's debt and the IMF and World Bank agreements signed under occupation. It doesn't mean blindly cheerleading for "the resistance." Because there isn't just one resistance in Iraq. Some elements of the armed resistance are targeting Iraqi civilians as they pray in Shia mosques—barbaric acts that serve the interests of the Bush administration by feeding the perception that the country is on the brink of civil war and therefore U.S. forces must remain in Iraq. Not everyone fighting the U.S. occupation is fighting for the freedom of all Iraqis; some are fighting for their own elite power. That's why we need to stay focused on supporting the demands for self-determination, not cheering any setback for U.S. empire.

And we can't cede the language, the territory of democracy. Anybody who says Iraqis don't want democracy should be deeply ashamed of themselves. Iraqis are clamoring for democracy and had risked their lives for it long before this invasion—in the 1991 uprising against Saddam, for example, when they were left to be slaughtered. The elections in January took place only because of tremendous pressure from Iraqi Shia communities that insisted on getting the freedom they were promised.



A sign from a demonstration in Rome marking the second anniversary of the Iraq invasion.

"The courage to be serious"

Many of us opposed this war because it was an imperial project. Now Iraqis are struggling for the tools that will make self-determination meaningful, not just for show elections or marketing opportunities for the Bush administration. That means it's time, as Susan Son-tag said, to have "the courage to be serious." The reason why the 58 percent of Americans against the war has not translated into the same millions of people on the streets that we saw before the war is because we haven't come forward with a serious policy agenda. We should not be afraid to be serious.

Part of that seriousness is to echo the poli-cy demands made by voters and demonstra-tors in the streets of Baghdad and Basra and bring those demands to Washington, where the decisions are being made.

But the core fight is over respect for interna-tional law, and whether there is any respect for it at all in the United States. Unless we're fight-ing a core battle against this administration's total disdain for the very idea of international law, then the specifics really don't matter.

We saw this very clearly in the U.S. presi-dential campaign, as John Kerry let Bush completely set the terms for the debate.

Recall the ridicule of Kerry's mention of a "global test," and the charge that it was cow-ardly and weak to allow for any international scrutiny of U.S. actions. Why didn't Kerry ever challenge this assumption? I blame the Kerry campaign as much as I blame the Bush administration. During the elections, he never said "Abu Ghraib." He never said "Guanta-namo Bay." He accepted the premise that to submit to some kind of "global test" was to be weak. Once they had done that, the Demo-crats couldn't expect to win a battle against Alberto Gonzales being appointed attorney general, when they had never talked about torture during the campaign.

And part of the war has to be a media war in this country. The problem is not that the anti-war voices aren't there—it's that the voic-es aren't amplified. We need a strategy to target the media in this country, making it a site of protest itself. We must demand that the me-dia let us hear the voices of anti-war critics, of enraged mothers who have lost their sons for a lie, of betrayed soldiers who fought in a war they didn't believe in. And we need to keep deepening the definition of democracy—to say that these show elections are not democ-racy, and that we don't have a democracy in

this country either.

Sadly, the Bush administration has done a better job of using the language of respon-sibility than we in the anti-war movement. The message that's getting across is that we are saying "just leave," while they are saying, "we can't just leave, we have to stay and fix the problem we started."

We can have a very detailed, responsible agenda and we shouldn't be afraid of it. We should be saying, "Let's pull the troops out but let's leave some hope behind." We can't be afraid to talk about reparations, to demand freedom from debt for Iraq, a total abandonment of Bremer's illegal economic laws, full Iraqi con-trol over the reconstruction budget—there are many more examples of concrete policy demands that we can and must put forth. When we articulate a more genuine definition of democracy than we are hearing from the Bush administration, we will bring some hope to Iraq. And we will bring closer to us many of the 58 percent who are opposed to the war but aren't marching with us yet because they are afraid of cutting and running. ■

NAOMI KLEIN is currently writing a book about extreme country makeovers and is writer/co-pro-ducer of the documentary film *The Take*.

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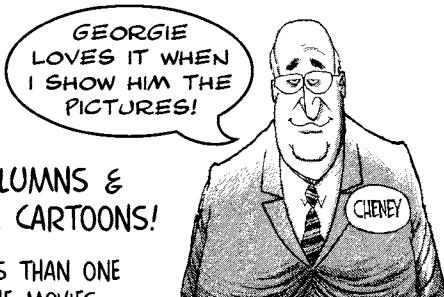
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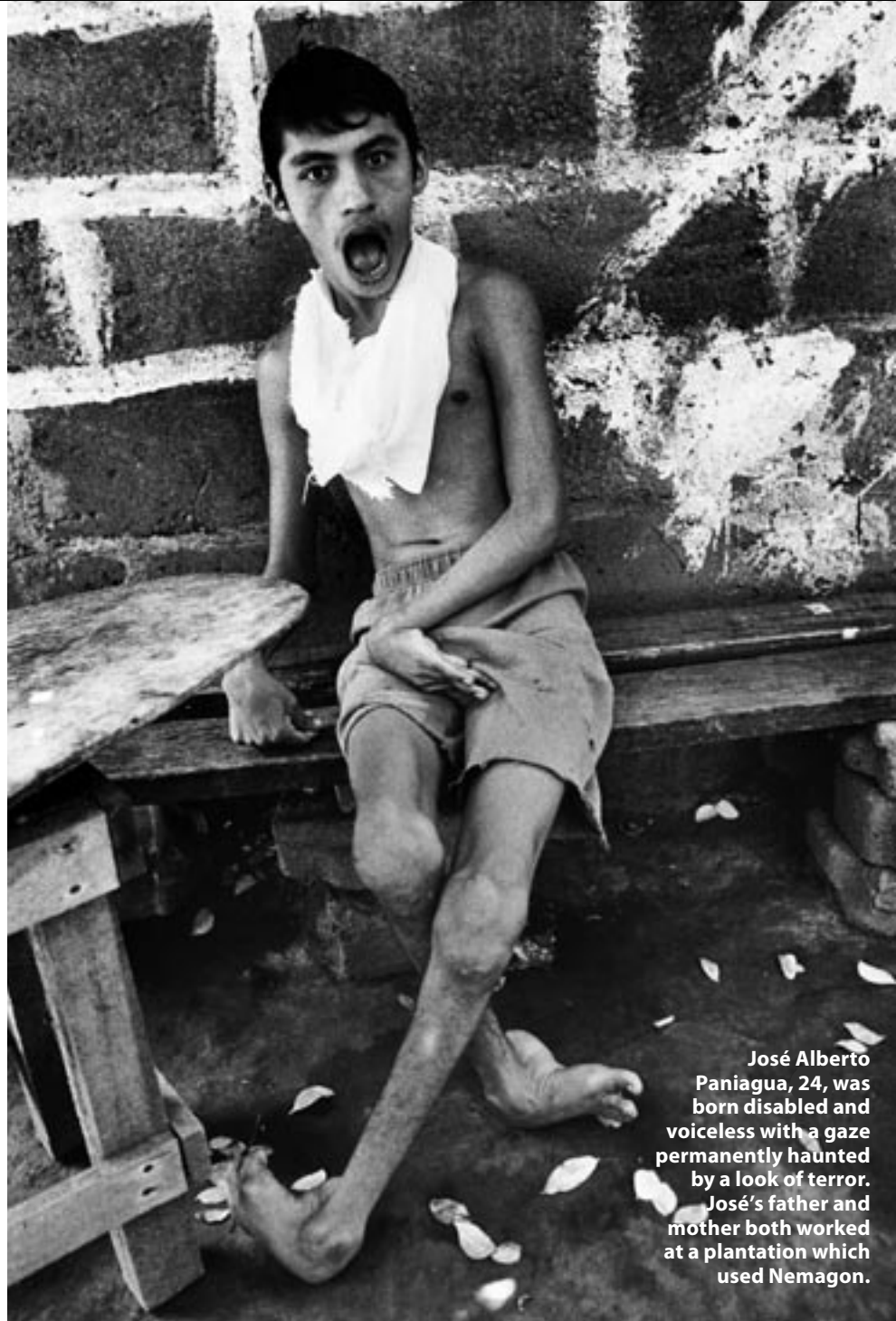
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BY NICOLAS BÉRUBÉ

CHIQUITA'S CHILDREN

In the '70s and '80s, the banana companies Dole, Del Monte and Chiquita used a carcinogenic pesticide, Nemagon, to protect their crops in Nicaragua. Today, the men and women who worked on those plantations suffer from incurable illnesses. Their children are deformed. The companies feign innocence.



José Alberto Paniagua, 24, was born disabled and voiceless with a gaze permanently haunted by a look of terror. José's father and mother both worked at a plantation which used Nemagon.

CHINANDEGA, NICARAGUA—Carlos Alberto Rodríguez sits prostrate in his rocking chair all day, from dawn to dusk. At first view it looks like this ex-plantation worker—young to be retired, at the age of 55—is giving his body a much-deserved rest after a lifetime of hard work, in which 14-hour days and six-day weeks were the norm. But when he took his retirement nine years ago, Rodríguez's health quickly deteriorated. First he lost his memory, then his ability to speak, and finally, his capacity to engage in any way with the people around him.

Today, Rodríguez, reputed to have been a jovial *bon vivant*, is unable to walk or take care of himself. His wife Membreño stopped working in order to care for him. She spoon feeds him and washes him daily; she addresses him like one would a newborn.

For 23 years, Rodríguez irrigated the fields of the Chinandega area, the most important banana region in Nicaragua. His job was to ensure that the pesticide used at the time, Nemagon, was distributed uniformly over the entire surface of the fields. It was a meticulous assignment that he performed dutifully, without thinking for one minute that the fine whitish mist that fell atop the banana plants every dawn was in fact one of the most dangerous poisons ever created. A pesticide so toxic that it was banned from use in its country of conception, the United States, where today those responsible for public health believe it should never have been put into circulation.

"When he'd come home from work he'd have it all over him," explains Membreño, who herself worked for the plantations from 1972 to 1984, and who was operated on last year for uterine cancer. "On his skin, all over his clothes, in his hair—he was always covered with Nemagon."

In Chinandega, a two-hour drive from Managua and one of the poorest provinces of the country, Rodríguez's case is no surprise to anyone. The ailments suffered by the *banañeros*, or banana plantation workers, are familiar to all in this region of earthen streets and cement-block houses.

Mostly in their fifties, the *banañeros* suffer from kidney failure, diminishing

eyesight and bones that are weakening at the rate of octogenarians. They can manage sleep only with the assistance of medication that saps both their morale and their money. The sickest among them have cancer of the reproductive system, testicular in the men, uterine in the women; their days are numbered because treatment is as expensive as their wallets are empty.

Dr. Francisco López of Hospital España in Chinandega has personally examined more than 3,000 ex-plantation workers suffering from diseases directly related to their exposure to Nemagon in the '70s. "The most common effects are sterility, chronic kidney failure and skin disease," he says. "Some see their nervous system deteriorate. The women exposed show abnormally high numbers of miscarriages, and many of their children are born with congenital deformities."

López estimates the number of affected *banañeros* at about 15,000. In the '70s, when Nemagon was used, there were 28,000 people working in the plantations.

Nemagon—also known as dibromochloropropane, or DBCP—was developed in the early '50s in the United States by Dow Chemical Co. and Shell Chemicals and marketed as a miracle product.

Used to protect banana and pineapple plants, Nemagon destroys the microscopic worms that attack banana tree roots. Nemagon makes the trees grow and stay healthier, longer.

Today, we know that the companies had reason to worry about the potential danger of their product from the start. Laboratory tests conducted in the '50s revealed that Nemagon caused testicular atrophy in rats. Regardless, scientists defended the product and in 1961 it was given the green light by the Department of Agriculture. The pesticide was instantly successful with American fruit companies, which exported it to their plantations in Central America and all over the world.

The health problems caused by Nemagon were first observed in 1977. That year, a third of the workers in a California factory that produced the chemical were declared sterile. They sued Occidental Petroleum Corporation, their employer, which was forced to pay millions in compensation to the affected workers.

That same year, the Environment Protection Agency ordered American companies to stop using Nemagon, judging it too noxious for human contact. But the ordinance was valid only for the United States. Standard Fruit Co. (now known as Dole Food Co. in the United States) continued to use Nemagon in Honduras as late as December 1978, a year after the disclosure of the sterility problem, as well as at its Philippine plantations until well into the late '80s. The result: Tens of thousands of workers continued to be exposed to the nefarious chemical for years.

Shocking symptoms

Pabla de la Concepción Núñez, 68, worked in the Chinandega region plantation from 1970 to 1980. From 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., five days a week, she worked in the field cutting off banana bunches, pruning the flowers off the banana trees and sticking "Dole" stickers onto the bananas.

"We would only get half an hour to eat lunch," she says. "We had to be fast. We didn't have time to go and wash our hands. The water we drank came directly from the runoff from the fields."

Years of exposure to Nemagon have left their mark. Núñez now has kidney problems, and the skin of her legs is cracked and regularly infected. In the early '80s, she gave birth to a stillborn child. Then she had a son who was born without his left hand.

The workers' children are often those most affected by the pesticide. When Simcoa Paniagua and Mercedes Alvarez, both of whom were exposed to Nemagon during the '70s, tried to have a child, they first had a son with such extreme deformities he died at the age of 2, and then they had José Alberto. He is 24 today, and unable to either walk or talk. His gaze is permanently haunted by a look of terror, as if he were witnessing a never-ending sequence of horrific images.

The most striking case, though, remains Roberto Francisco, who at 11 is a likeable, smiley and bright boy, born with his four limbs so atrociously deformed that he is unable to move. Roberto is confined to his wheelchair, which his friends manipulate to get him to school and back. "I can't do sports, but

I like watching my friends play soccer,” he says when asked what he likes to do in his free time. When he grows up he hopes to become “a deputy, an engineer or a lawyer.” Roberto’s father worked in the plantation from 1971 to 1992. For now, his grandmother is raising him; she makes a living selling corn patties that she cooks in her own wood stove.

According to Dr. Barry Levy, former president of the American Public Health Association, Nemagon is so dangerous that it should never have been put into circulation. “The product’s creators should have become alarmed as early as the mid-’50s, when lab tests revealed it was making rats sterile,” he says. “But that didn’t stop it being put on the market.”

“The most amazing thing about the Nemagon catastrophe is that it could have been avoided,” Levy continues. “The companies went forward. And then when the American government abolished the product here, they expedited it to other countries.”

Who made the decision to ignore the alarming effects of Nemagon on laboratory rats? What ethical principles guided those involved in the product’s development? The answers may never be clear, but a comment by Clyde McBeth, one of the chemists behind Nemagon, is telling. In response to a question about the sterility caused by the pesticide in certain Central American workers, he told a *Mother Jones* reporter: “From what I hear, they could use a little birth control down there.”

Battling for restitution

Dawn is breaking in El Viejo, a village near Chinandega, and dozens of people are heading toward an empty lot. Dressed in rags and dirty dresses, barefoot, the masses walk under the heavy mango tree branches and enter a large straw hut that protects them from the sun. Some sip on Coca-Cola, others pull a couple of cordobas from their pockets to treat themselves to a corn patty. After an hour, a crowd of 200 workers has gathered to discuss the millions of dollars they are owed.

Victorino Espinales, 51, an ex-Sandinista warrior sporting a belly, a hard stare and the gift of gab, takes hold of a microphone and welcomes everyone. “Thank you for coming,” he says, smiling. “It is essential that we remain united in this, the most important battle of our lives.”

Espinales was 25 in 1979 when he enrolled in the revolutionary forces that threw out dictator Anastasio Somoza that year. He took up arms again a few years later, in 1983, to lead a 2,700-man division to battle the Contras, the right-wing militia supported by the CIA that aimed to topple the Sandinistan government.

Now he uses the courtroom as his battleground. Since the mid-’90s, he has been the head of an association of *bananeros* united in their suit against the American companies. A slew of cases concerning the 8,000 victims in the Chinandega region are currently in the works.

Two major agreements made in the ’90s fueled the *bananeros*’ hope. In 1997, all the concerned companies, with the



The hand of a worker exposed to Nemagon in the '70s.

exception of Dole, agreed to give the approximately 26,000 workers from Central America, the Philippines and Africa \$41.5 million, a sum that, once divided among the workers and their lawyers, brought \$1,500 to each. In Costa Rica, an earlier 1992 agreement had allotted \$20 million to 1,000 affected workers.

Himself the son of a *bananero*, Espinales began working intermittently in the banana plantations at the age of 18. Today he suffers pain throughout his body, especially in his kidneys. A sperm exam performed a few years ago revealed that 60 percent of his spermatozooids were dead, and part of the remaining percentage were seriously defective.

Since then, he has refused to consult a physician. “I am resisting,” he says. “I’m afraid of what the doctor would tell me. I’m afraid it will be the end.”

In the meantime, he and his association have accumulated quite a few judicial victories, which nevertheless remain symbolic. In December 2002, as a result of one of the most elaborate court cases ever seen in Nicaragua, a national tribunal sentenced the American multinationals Shell, Dole and Dow to pay \$489 million in damages and interest to 450 workers affected by Nemagon.

The companies, however, refused to appear in court during the trial and still refuse to pay a penny of the fine. In fact, the companies in question joined together to reject the workers’ accusations. They



This woman’s skin disease is a common result of exposure to Nemagon.

deem the Nicaraguan court system to be corrupt, and therefore incapable of determining a fair sentence.

According to Freya Maneki, director of corporate communications for Dole, no study has proved that workers have suffered health problems after having been exposed to Nemagon. "We believe that the majority of the plaintiffs have not been affected by Nemagon," she says.

Scot Wheeler, spokesman for Dow, says that his company did its share by sticking warning labels on the vats of Nemagon, encouraging workers to read them and asking that employers provide their workers with the necessary safety equipment.

These are incendiary words to Dr. Arthur L. Frank, director of the environmental health department of Philadelphia's Drexel University and a researcher at the National Cancer Institute. "The labels were written in English," Frank says. "Even if they had been written in Spanish, there's no guarantee the workers could have read them, since many among them are illiterate. And it isn't as if the companies weren't aware that the product was dangerous. If the product was making people sick here in the States, it's only logical that it would also make people sick elsewhere in the world."

In 2003, the ex-workers joined forces with a California law firm in order to sue



Placed in the backyard of the Paniagua family, this swing was given to employees by the Chiquita Company.

the companies on American soil, where they would be forced to attend the trial. But the document presented in court contained a handful of technical errors, resulting from the translation from Spanish to English, and was not admitted.

In December 2003, the companies concerned—Shell, Dow and Dole—fought back by bringing a \$17 billion countersuit against the ex-plantation workers. In this lawsuit, Dole referred to the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO), a law usually used in defense of victims of crimes committed by the Mafia.

The companies accused the 4,200 workers, their lawyers and the doctors who examined them of fraud. They accused them of including names on their lists of victims of people who have never worked on the plantations. They accused them of trying to get rich at the companies' expense.

A victims' march

In Nicaragua, the ex-workers aren't giving up. In the last two years they've organized three marches from Chinandega to Managua, more than 84 miles. The last of these marches, begun on January 31, 2004, attracted more than 5,000 people, many of whom are sick and weak.

"We walked for 10 days," says Espinales, who was one of the march's organizers. "Once we were there we were made to camp in front of the National Assembly for days before the president would pay us any attention."

The march garnered national interest thanks to its size and length. The big Nicaraguan dailies dedicated full pages to the

victims of Nemagon, a product dubbed "death's dew."

The results were unprecedented. President Enrique Bolaños named a ministerial commission to investigate the consequences of Nemagon use. And Espinales' lobbying enabled Nemagon victims to get free medical treatment, though it could take years before the promise is implemented.

Until then, the lawsuits continue, and the workers pray every day for justice. As for Espinales, he intends to fight "to his very last breath."

"The companies have already offered me \$20,000 to stop the proceedings, to let the case slide," he says. "I refused. I told them I was fighting not for money, but to create a precedent that could help the other workers in the world confronted with similar problems."

López, who has followed the *banañeros* saga for many years, would like to believe that the workers will eventually be compensated. But he fears it will be impossible.

"The people are sick, but things are at a stalemate, legally speaking," he says. "I don't want to play devil's advocate, but I don't think these workers will ever be compensated. It's a thought that saddens me very much." ■

NICOLAS BÉRUBÉ, 28, is a reporter for the Montreal-based daily newspaper *La Presse*. He covers international as well as local stories.

BENOIT AQUIN, 42, is a freelance photographer. His work has been published in various magazines, including *Wired*, *Canadian Geographic* and *Macleans*. He lives in Montreal.



Mrs. Nicolás Caballero, 63, worked in banana plantations from 1973 to 1989. She suffers from terrible sores on her legs, chronic pain and aching bones.



BY CRAIG AARON

The Plot to Elect Kerry

For progressives, the only sensible way to approach Byron York's new book is by giving it "the Washington read"—index first—to find the names of your friends and allies. It's like cracking open a high school yearbook, except the

homecoming king is George Soros.

Unfortunately, *The Vast Left Wing Conspiracy* isn't nearly as enjoyable when read from page one. York, the White House correspondent for the *National Review*, promises "the untold story" of "the biggest, richest and best-organized movement in American political history." But, alas, the conspiracy is neither as vast nor as cunning as advertised.

This breathless bit of reportage goes "behind-the-scenes" to "the Chinese restaurant where MoveOn was born" and "the Washington restaurant where Democratic operatives hatch their plans." In between meals, York takes in a few flicks by Michael Moore and Robert Greenwald, and uncovers a plot hatched by EMILY's List, Al Franken and a motley crew of "anti-Bush" bloggers "to bring down the president" by—gasp!—voting against him.

York's capable of quality journalism, such as his sympathetic but serious article on the downfall of the *American Spectator* in the November 2001 *Atlantic Monthly*. So it's regrettable that *The Vast Left Wing Conspiracy* is riddled with sloppy analysis, fuzzy statistics and convenient straw men because the left could benefit from a serious critique by the other side. Rather than puncturing preconceived notions or exploring whether the "anti-Bush" cabal's innovations truly represent a sea-change in American politics, York resorts to the all-too-easy portrayal of his political opponents as a "delusional" band of "extremist" wingnuts. York's plan of attack is death by a thousand cuts—using petty nitpicking, misleading quotes and rhetorical sleight-of-hand to portray the left as a junta of out-of-touch elites.

For instance, York paints MoveOn as part of the

“peacenik” fringe for daring to question the bombing of Afghanistan and invasion of Iraq. (Warnings that, in hindsight, look awfully prescient with both Osama and the WMDs still at large.) York says the group has done little more than “connect a bunch of people who already agreed with each other.” He means it as an insult. But one could say the same thing is the very definition of movement-building. After all, before MoveOn, millions of people didn’t have a vehicle for their political views and hadn’t gotten involved in electoral

The Vast Left Wing Conspiracy
By Byron York
Crown Forum
277 pages, \$26.95

politics, made a campaign donation or called their member of Congress. But York insists that MoveOn mistakes its rapid membership growth—the envy of almost every interest group in Washington, left or right—for a genuine political movement. “As it became more successful and better known,” he writes, “MoveOn’s list of members grew to about 2.5 million people. It was an impressive number, but not *that* impressive compared with the votes one needed to be elected president.”

Which is sort of like saying, sure, Moore made the most successful documentary of all time, but it doesn’t matter because more people saw *Spider Man 2*. Oh wait, York says *that*.

In a bizarre chapter devoted to debunking the notion that *Fahrenheit 9/11* was truly a nationwide hit, York is enraged that Moore’s fans packed the theaters on opening weekend in a devious scheme “to create the sense that the movie was a phenomenon sweeping the country.” Not so, says York, who

spends five pages on a series of charts showing that the film did better in Blue states than Red ones. Of course, the statistics don’t disprove Moore’s box-office records or deny his success of getting played in multiplexes everywhere. It merely shows, unsurprisingly, that *Fahrenheit 9/11* did better in Seattle than Dallas. (The real shocker is York’s revelation that Karl Rove watched *Fahrenheit 9/11* on a bootleg DVD. Call the MPAA!)

And on he goes, using the same type of distorted comparisons to impugn Robert Greenwald, director of the best-selling, low-budget documentaries *Outfoxed* and *Uncovered*, who’s dismissed because he “didn’t change the political climate and influence the presidential race in a land of 120 million voters.” Air America’s Franken is mocked for being “too sensitive” about being misquoted. And he claims the Center for American Progress is a “talking points factory” rather than a real think tank like the Heritage Foundation. He proves this by reprinting pages of headlines from *The Progress Report* e-newsletter and comparing them to the boring titles of Heritage documents. Case closed.

York does raise legitimate

points about the questionable accounting methods of 527s like Americans Coming Together. And he calls out former campaign finance reformer George Soros, correctly summing up Soros’ claim to be operating in the “common interest” as little more than “they’re bad because I say they’re bad, while I am good because I say I am good.”

No one, even with the best intentions, can pour \$27 million into a political campaign without undue influence. There should be serious concerns about whether the left can build a viable grassroots movement if it’s beholden to the whims of a few rich individuals. But York only milks this dilemma to portray the entire left as a band of Hampton-summering socialites. Plus, it’s hard to take him seriously as a campaign finance reform advocate when he ignores the dubious activities of his own party—with their Swift Boat Veterans and big-money bundling Rangers and Pioneers.

In fact, completely missing from the book is any detailed comparison or examination of the right. This is a fatal flaw given that the most promising elements of the “Vast Left Wing Conspiracy” are explicitly modeled on the successful tactics of the right (which, once

upon a time, stole them from the left—but that’s another story). After 25 years of being steamrolled, progressives are finally awakening to the need to build infrastructure, nurture intellectuals, work outside the Democratic Party without abandoning it, invest in its own media and take advantage of new technology. But you can’t duplicate decades of work in just 18 months.

York claims that the Vast Left Wing Conspiracy failed to defeat George W. Bush because they resided “on the fringes of American political life, even though they thought they were near the middle.” He concludes: “One could have a large following—say 2 or 3 million people—and still be firmly on the fringes. But it doesn’t look that way from the inside. If you are running a Web site or an advocacy group, the sheer size of your membership ... might convince you that your influence is enormous.”

But York misses the big picture. Political change in this country doesn’t come from the center. The energy, ideas and innovation originate at the fringes—right or left. Can a well-organized group of “extremists” shift the center of political debate and seize power? Well, it has happened before. ■

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Former Enron CEO
Jeff Skilling pays the
price for revealing
the ruthlessness of
corporate capitalism.

BY PAT DOWELL

Not Far from the Tree

Alex Gibney's *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* is based on the eponymous book by Peter Elkind and Bethany McLean, the *Fortune* reporter who first alerted the lethargic financial press to the peculiar nature of

Enron's business model back in 2001. The authors appear in the movie, along with many more witnesses, victims, perpetrators and bystanders, some of whom appear in breathtakingly arrogant inside-Enron videos and audio recordings.

At its most unadorned, this would be a talking-heads story, but Gibney has dressed it in all the techniques of the moment, using everything from the animated type of "motion graphics" to the hyperkinetic editing of car commercials. A sometimes too-literal soundtrack aggressively punctuates the story. Gibney clearly thinks he has to fight for the viewer's attention in order to explain Enron's mind-numbing scams, and he successfully accomplishes that daunting task. Would you understand more about the Enron swindle if you read the book it was based on?

Obviously, there is more factual detail in hundreds of pages. But there is a glittering impact in the accumulation of images and audio bursts packed into the movie's short two hours.

And there are some deceptions a book cannot unravel as vividly as a film, such as the answer to narrator Peter Coyote's question, "Who is M. Yass?" The name of an illusory participant in one Enron scheme, "M. Yass" appears in a close-up at the bottom of a document. The film then animates the 'Y' so that it slides left to join the 'M,' creating the answer: "MY ass." Remember, these are the guys who named phantom partnerships after Star Wars characters.

The frat boys at Enron did do something illegal enough to warrant warrants and, eventually, convictions (although Ken

Lay's trial does not start until 2006), and even cost them some of their own millions. To put that in perspective: Lay bleats that his net worth was reduced to less than \$20 million, with liquidity under a million. Let me brush away yet another tear of bitter laughter.

But do these prosecutions in any way support the assertion by the president and others that these were the proverbial bad apples, rather than an example of the way things are supposed to be, only super-sized? This is the most useful and enduring question about Enron.

The film repeatedly raises the "bad apple" thesis and then bats it down, usually with sarcasm. But it seems unable to muster the same clarity on this matter as on the airtight case it makes for Enron's California electricity blitzkrieg. The film

and book do painstakingly demonstrate that Enron's intricate web of fraud was spun by not only the energy corporation and the late century-old accounting firm Arthur Andersen, but also the nation's largest banks and stock brokerage firms, and of course that Sleeping Beauty, the acquiescent Securities and Exchange Commission. And let's not forget those oblivious fellow travelers on television and in trade magazines who seemed to believe anything they were told.

The film goes to great lengths to hang the story on personalities (a modern media imperative) and so it is necessarily a bit hard to see the system that produced them. But Gibney wisely returns at the end of the film to point the way to understanding Enron by offering up Enron's own contemptuously hypocritical corporate slogan: "Ask Why."

To answer that question would require an additional movie, one that can explain the significance of Enron's fall and why the thud crushed millions of the not-rich while only grazing the super-rich. That movie would demonstrate why, ultimately, American capitalism had to find a way to prosecute the Enron boys, not for being financial mobsters (although this is organized crime if ever there was any), but because they did something akin to spilling the secrets of the Skull and Bones—their ruthlessness made the nucleus of corporate capitalism all too obvious.

To understand that, the film required is last year's *The Corporation*, which has just come out on DVD with lots of extras. Gibney's film is the definitive case study underscoring *The Corporation's* excellent analysis of the pitiless history and philosophy that made Enron possible, indeed inevitable. ■

PAT DOWELL is an independent film journalist whose stories have been heard on NPR since 1987.

BY JAMES PARKER

The Horror, The Horror

Much as it might suit my obscure and inhuman agenda to sling a brickbat in the direction of McSweeney's, *The Believer* and the entire gasbag citadel of Eggers-ville, in the case of Michel Houellebecq's *H.P. Lovecraft*:

Against the World, Against Life, I must toss a bouquet. Because in translating and reprinting this 1991 monograph on the horror writer H.P. Lovecraft, Believer Books has done something excellent, granting us access to a real one-off, an exotic collision of sensibilities. Houellebecq, post-human French novelist, recipient of prizes, connoisseur of addiction and erotic malaise, meets Lovecraft, the gigantically prissy New Englander who couldn't leave his imagination alone.

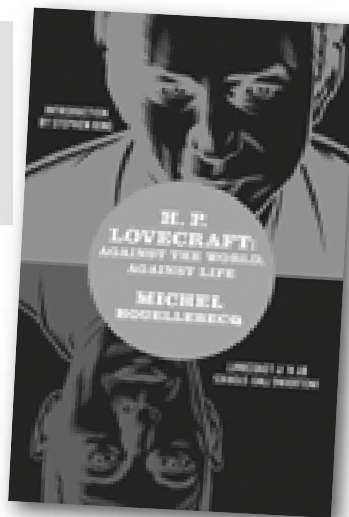
What can they possibly have in common, these two? We compare Houellebecq's flattened prose with the dripping cathedral of Lovecraft's high style, and the Frenchman's sprawling worldliness with the American's cramped little life. But it turns out that the two writers, half a century and a continent apart, are secret brothers. If Lovecraft had a message, it was this: Mean human, you are powerless—rancid horror leers at you from beyond the stars, where members of the Great Race, old beyond Time, wait to swoop down on greasy wings and reclaim the Earth. Take out the greasy wings, and this is more or less Houellebecq's worldview too. When Lovecraft proclaims in a letter that he "can conceive of no true image of the pattern

H.P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life
By Michel Houellebecq
Believer Books
150 Pages, \$18.00

of life and cosmic force, unless it be a jumble of mean dots arrang'd in directionless spirals," it is sweet music to Houellebecq, for whom life, we learn in the book's opening line, is "painful and disappointing."

Against the World, by contrast, is enjoyable and satisfying. Continually and gracefully, Houellebecq switches modes, now channeling the cranky Lovecraft, now observing him from an ironic, sympathetic remove. "There are no ghosts under the tumescent moon; there are only bloated cadavers, swollen and black, about to explode in pestilential vomiting" is an example of the first mode. Describing Lovecraft's fruitless hunt for employment in the '20s as "vaguely burlesque" is an example of the second. To shift perspective like this was, of course, a luxury that Lovecraft himself did not have. He was condemned to be himself, and to live with his obsessions, *all the time*.

Lovecraft was an astonishingly visceral racist, for example,



a race-hater almost without comparison in literary biography. Newly married (his only relationship with a woman, and it would be over within three years), he arrived on New York's Lower East Side with his bigotries tightly wound, and you can almost hear the fat *twang*, as the mental elastic snaps and the little cogs go flying. The variety, the otherness, the shoving, humid "alienage" (his pet word, possibly made up)—it was all too much. "Melting pot" ... That's a good thing, right? Where you eat Korean fish patties in the street and dance to a steel band? Not for Lovecraft: "I thought of some avenue of Cyclopean and unwholesome vats, crammed

to the vomiting-point with gangrenous vileness, and about to burst and inundate the world in one leprous cataclysm of semi-fluid rottenness."

Houellebecq, saucy polemicist that he is, hails the above (from a letter to fellow sci-fi writer Frank Belknap Long) as "indisputably great Lovecraftian prose," but he also notes that Lovecraft was at this point "actually deranged." "Italo-Semitic-Mongoloids ... they were monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal; vaguely moulded from some stinking viscous slime of earth's corruption." This isn't spleen. This isn't bile. This isn't even shit. This is Lovecraft's own organic concoction, a weed-green tincture produced by steeping his essentially masochistic nature in an orgy of perception. (He wrote his stories the same way.) Houellebecq can't help enjoying it. Once safely back in Providence, we are told, Lovecraft regained some of his customary poise, and—great line—"his admiration for Hitler subsided."

So Houellebecq's Lovecraft is reactionary, anti-Enlightenment, wrong-headed, remorseless, indefensible: a truly poetic soul. Houellebecq is clearly taken with—moved by, really—Lovecraft's ability to be disgusted. And we can see that now and again in his own fiction he reaches for it, for that fine Lovecraftian *seethe*; a character in his *Elementary Particles* "felt as though what was between his legs was a piece of oozing, putrefying meat devoured by worms." But Houellebecq's heart isn't really in it. He's too modern. He lacks the necessary repressions, what Henry James called "the great Puritan 'whip,' the whip for the conscience and the nerves." He lacks, not to put too fine a point on it, the breeding. ■

JAMES PARKER lives in Boston and writes frequently for *Arthur magazine*.

BY ALIX RULE

A Brooding Calm

Set in London on February 15, 2003, when millions gathered to protest the Iraq war, Ian McEwan's *Saturday* is entirely in the present tense. Henry

Perowne, 48, springs out of bed at 4 a.m. so effortlessly that one can't help but be filled with foreboding. Sure enough, within pages, Perowne is watching a flaming jet descend over London, particularly terrifying in the post-9/11 present, when "words like 'catastrophe' and 'mass fatalities,' 'chemical and biological warfare' and 'major attack' have recently become bland through repetition."

But nothing happens. Perowne retreats into his London townhouse and impeccable life. His wife, still asleep, is a successful lawyer; his daughter, a soon-to-be published poet; his son a dutiful rock star. His own career—cutting into human brains with precision—is stellar. The sense of malaise, however, is never fully shaken.

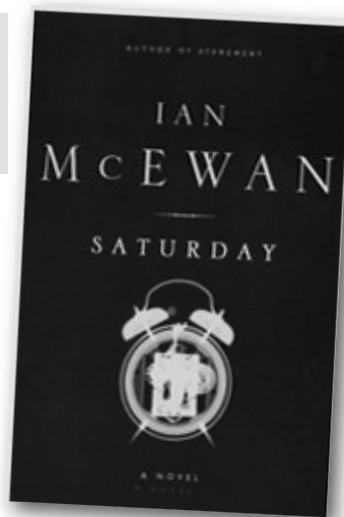
Like McEwan's *Amsterdam*, *Atonement* and *Enduring Love*, *Saturday* turns on a single event that forever alters its characters' lives. The surreal crisis of the entire Perowne family is the book's climax, a micro-9/11 that forces them to realize just how fragile their prosperous equilibrium is. But the source of the crisis is external. The Perownes' London townhouse is without a single skeleton in the closet, and the guiltless Perownes are genuinely free of pathologies. McEwan

Saturday

By Ian McEwan
Nan A. Talese
304 Pages, \$26

may persuade (some) readers to believe in his harmonious little clique, but as a social allegory, his image of family life is hard to swallow.

Henry Perowne is nothing if not acutely self-aware. Blessed with both an articulate consciousness of his personal gifts and a doctor's sensitivity to the fragile metabolism of his complex city and society, Perowne is a man happily committed to his present. He relishes making love to his wife of 25 years and living in a wealthy Western democracy, without taking either for granted. He scoffs at trendy postmodern doubts: "If the present dispensation is wiped out now, the future will look back on us as gods, certainly in this city, lucky gods blessed by supermarket cornucopias, torrents of accessible information, warm clothes that weigh nothing, extended lifespans, wondrous machines." Some will enjoy these highbrow musings, others will be dismayed to find that they never stop: Perowne's witty analysis of contemporary life continues



even in the shower.

Matthew Arnold, another great humanist, reflected on the modern present that his society was entering, albeit with a healthy dose of uncertainty about what the future held. Arnold is *Saturday*'s hero (and not just spiritually, the poet himself has a key cameo); but the modern Western society that Henry Perowne celebrates has advanced 150 years into middle age. McEwan's London is a city enjoying a comfortable prime, where "even the overfull litter baskets suggest abundance rather than squalor," and all the possibilities of modern capitalism's affluence have been fully realized. For a book about the present, *Saturday* is less

concerned with current events than with middle age itself.

This is the case even when McEwan makes Perowne's mind a forum for the constant rehearsal of the moral difficulties involved in taking a stance on current affairs in the Middle East. Perowne, in his ambivalence about the war in Iraq, is tacitly superior to the pro- or anti-war partisans. McEwan brilliantly depicts the thinking man's predicament: Perowne sits for hours on the sofa absorbed in newspapers, heroically. But despite all his conscientious deliberation about outcomes, Perowne is never troubled by the inevitability of the war.

To be fair, Daisy Perowne is allowed a few intelligent critiques of her father's (anti-) politics. But *Saturday*'s children are poets and musicians, their protest a self-indulgent exercise in sloganeering, their postmaterialism a product of growing up in abundance. They'll soon forget their facile political convictions, or grow out of them. We learn to pay attention to the precious richness of the familiar in maturity, and McEwan's *Saturday* is similarly preoccupied with the near and dear.

Unfortunately, equanimity makes for better novels than politics. Not a radical at 20, no heart; still a radical at 40, no brain, as they say. *Saturday* has been dubbed "a brainy book," and it is. It's often much more, stunning in its prose, subtle in its views of "domestic" life. But Matthew Arnold is a more sympathetic writer for those whose stake in the present is the future: "Calm's not life's crown, though calm is well. / 'Tis all perhaps which man acquires / But 'tis not what our youth desires." Younger readers may well put down *Saturday* unmoved, feeling with some trepidation that this is one novel we'll someday grow into. ■

ALIX RULE lives in Oxford, U.K., where she studies politics.

Haiti

Continued from page 15

violent death on March 31. One veteran Haitian dissident told Griffin that despite Apaid's claims to be non-political, he was in fact "the government's boss."

Griffin believes "Lavalas gangs" has become a catchphrase used to justify further repression. "The U.N. is in there to make it legitimate, but they can't even talk to the people they're supposed to be helping," he says. "There's no strategy in entering the poorest neighborhoods during so-called security operations. They shoot wildly, as do the police. Since Aristide was ousted, the outspoken democratic leaders, including government officials, have been either killed or arrested."

"For Aristide to be blamed for their desperation is absurd," he concludes.

The Latortue regime has also accused Aristide of orchestrating violence from his exile in South Africa—a questionable charge according to human rights lawyer Brian Concannon, who worked for years to put death squad leader Chamblain behind bars. (The Latortue regime acquitted

Chamblain last summer in an overnight trial that Amnesty International called "an insult to justice" and a "mockery.")

"Latortue can say that Aristide is backing violence in Port-au-Prince without presenting any proof and it's presented as gospel in the newspapers," Concannon says. "But when people talk to our lawyers in Haiti about the interim government's persecution of dissidents, they have extremely credible, consistent and corroborated information. That information will not get into the mainstream media."

Such bias has also characterized the electoral process. In November, Roselot Julien resigned as president of the Provisional Electoral Council, calling preparations for the upcoming elections a "burlesque comedy." Julien warned that other panel members were trying to rig the ballot and that the council was not capable of ensuring free and fair elections. The council has also excluded representatives of Lavalas.

"Today in 2005, who can expect free, fair and democratic elections in Haiti with thousands of Lavalas [members]

in jail, exile and hiding?" asked Aristide at an April 19 press conference in South Africa. He demanded that four steps be taken to reverse the "tragic mistake" of the 2004 coup d'état.

In November, the president of Haiti's Electoral Council resigned, calling preparations for the upcoming elections a "burlesque farce".

"One, thousands of Lavalas who are in jail and in exile must be free to return home. Two, the repression that has already killed 10,000 people must end immediately. Three, then there must be national dialogue. Four, free, fair and democratic elections must be organized in an environment where the huge majority of Haitian people is neither excluded nor repressed as they have been up until today." ■

BEN TERRALL is a freelance writer based in San Francisco.



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Abuses of Race

Continued from back page

African blood became a prerequisite to slavery. The powerful proudly proclaimed slavery good for blacks, a conviction that informed the "black codes" of the mid-19th century South. John Bailey's *The Lost German Slave Girl* exhumes and examines some of the laws that both created and crushed the Other. While a slave could be raffled off or wagered at the master's whim, freeing a slave was fraught with legal obstacles. In Louisiana, anyone could halt the manumission process by alleging the slave's bad conduct. Indeed, freed slave was such a threat to the social order that the former master had to post a thousand dollar bond to guarantee the ex-slave's immediate exit from the state.

Bailey tells the fascinating true tale of Sally Miller, a New Orleans slave who in 1843 was suddenly "discovered" to be white. Blacks could not sue whites, but Miller sued her owner for damages in order to gain the freedom that would automatically follow a court's acceptance of her as a white woman.

Was Sally white? The question had no objective answer. A parade of distinguished citizens, whom she'd served as a slave, swore she wasn't—but as her lawyer repeatedly pointed out, they'd assumed she was black because she was being treated as a slave. Compounding their subjectivity was their demonization of her as Other, a strategy that conveniently masked the worst impulses of Us. A key question at the trial was whether Sally had given birth to her son Lafayette at the age of 10—for presumably, no white girl could have gotten knocked up at so indecently early an age, and it was understood that even the youngest black girl could seduce a white man.

Up North, free blacks remained the Other, though legally maintained oppression took the more subtle form of opportunity denied. In Sarah's *Long Walk*, Stephen and Paul Kendrick's earnest account of the mid-19th century fight to desegregate Boston's public schools, the authors describe a valiant free black community under siege from poverty and prejudice. Black integrationists became dogged activists: petitioning, boycotting and even suing, deploying black lawyer Robert Morris in partnership with future senator Charles Sumner. They lost—and the state's top court came forth with a rousing endorsement of

"separate but equal" schools.

Boston's black activists were so trapped by the larger society that the story of their efforts has all the drama of fireflies trying to escape from a jar. The book doesn't get exciting until the Fugitive Slave Law essentially busts the jar open, finally giving the black community white allies with clout. Ultimately, the tumultuous times swept an entire slate of Know-Nothings into the state legislature—and in 1855, they voted to desegregate the Boston schools. The pendulum swung forward, breaking down the racialized legal fiction of Other versus Us.

Today, the pendulum swings back. Fox News commentator Michelle Malkin's recent book, *In Defense of Internment: The Case for Racial Profiling in World War II and the War on Terror*, calls on Us to lock up the Other. Malkin claims that mass ethnic detentions are a prudent response to espionage and terror plots, as if securing a haystack automatically serves to pinpoint a needle. Her guilty-until-proven-innocent approach equates color with criminality and obstructs effective law enforcement. Only in the movies does

badass bullying expose conspiracies rather than recruit new conspirators to the cause. Dragnets can't substitute for field operatives and translators.

Only in the movies does badass bullying expose conspiracies rather than recruit new conspirators to the cause.

Most importantly, Malkin's sleazy tract shows how readily our laws and law officials become instruments of evil. The "black codes" and segregation laws of yesteryear were not the freak consequences of unenlightened times—they were the ordinary outcomes of those in power protecting their self-interest through division and despotism. If we dismiss these laws as rogue jurisprudence with no contemporary relevance, we are the rogues, oblivious to our complicity in racism. ■

PHYLLIS ECKHAUS is a writer based in New York.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



THE USES AND ABUSES OF RACE

BY PHYLLIS ECKHAUS

Race facilitates rule. If race did not exist, the powers-that-be would have had to invent it, for an ordered, hierarchical

society requires an Other, preferably physically distinct from Us.

The Other serves many purposes, sometimes providing a disposable work force.

In the 16th century, the Catholic Church in cahoots with the Spanish throne defended the enslavement of Native Americans by denying they were human. When the natives began dying off in droves, leaving a potential labor shortage, the Church threw its weight behind African slavery. Africans were presumed to be both subhuman and exceptionally hardy, well suited for the wear and tear of slavery in the New World.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31

This illustration appeared on an 1835 broadside illustrating John Greenleaf Whittier's poem, "My Countrymen in Chains."

